ABANDONING THE NOTION OF “TRANSLATION-INHERENT” EXPLICITATION: AGAINST A DOGMA OF TRANSLATION STUDIES

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Abstract: One of the best-known hypotheses of translation studies, the Explicitation Hypothesis, postulates that explicitation is “inherent” in the process of translation and may therefore be regarded as a “universal of translation”. In recent years, a number of corpus-based studies on explicitation have been produced, most of which purported to offer evidence in favor of this hypothesis. As a consequence, the alleged universality of explicitation has achieved the status of dogma in translation studies. The aim of the present article is to show that the dogma of translation-inherent explicitation rests on fallacious theoretical considerations and premature interpretations of empirical data. In the first place, it will be argued that the Explicitation Hypothesis strictly speaking does not even qualify as a scientific hypothesis, since it is unmotivated, unparsimonious and vaguely formulated. In the second place, it will be shown that previous studies on explicitation fail to provide conclusive evidence for the translation-inherent nature of explicitation due to a number of methodological shortcomings.

Keywords: explicitation, implicitation, translation universals, translation theory

1. INTRODUCTION

The assumption that translations are “inherently” more explicit than (1) their corresponding source texts and (2) comparable, non-translated texts written in the target language has become a dogma in translation studies. This is largely due to the tremendous influence that Blum-Kulka’s (1986) Explicitation Hypothesis has exerted on the development of this young discipline. The Explicitation Hypothesis claims that “explicitation is a universal strategy inherent in the process of language mediation” (Blum-Kulka 1986:21).
The present article is a plea to abandon the dogma of translation-inherent explicitation. It will be shown that previous research on the Explicitation Hypothesis has suffered from severe theoretical and methodological problems that we need to avoid if we want to find out what role explicitation really plays in translation. First, I am going to argue that the assumption of the translation-inherence of explicitation is unmotivated and should thus be replaced by a better and more useful hypothesis. Second, I will discuss two famous empirical studies that are often cited as proof of the existence of translation-inherent explicitation (Olohan and Baker 2000, Øverås 1998), showing that they in fact fail to provide conclusive evidence in favor of the Explicitation Hypothesis due to a number of methodological shortcomings (additional studies are discussed in Becher forthcoming a).

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 will begin by introducing some important definitions. In Section 3, Klaudy’s (2008) classification of explicitation phenomena into four different types will be briefly presented. Section 4 will then outline some grave theoretical problems in connection with the concept of translation-inherent explicitation, starting with a short exegesis of the famous passage from Blum-Kulka (1986) where the Explicitation Hypothesis was first formulated. In Section 5, the two arguably most important empirical studies on explicitation and their methodological problems will be discussed, leading us to the conclusion that they (as well as all other relevant studies I know of) fail to provide conclusive evidence for the translation-inherent status of this phenomenon. Section 6 will then conclude that due to the severe theoretical and methodological problems outlined, the Explicitation Hypothesis should be abandoned altogether and replaced by Klaudy’s (2009) Asymmetry Hypothesis.

2. DEFINITIONS

Many studies on explicitation suffer from the problem that the term “explicitation” is not properly defined, most commonly because terms such as “explicitness” and/or “implicitness” appear in the definiens which are themselves in need of a definition. In this section, I would like to propose proper definitions of all three terms. Let us start with implicitness:

**Implicitness** is the non-verbalization of information that the addressee might be able to infer.

The reader is asked to note the following important points about this definition. First, there is the epistemic modal *might*: it does not matter whether the addressee is actually able to infer the non-verbalized information or whether the
inference fails – which obviously happens occasionally in conversation. For the
definition above, it is sufficient when the piece of information in question is in-
ferable in a “theoretically motivated sense” (cf. Steiner’s 2005:11 definition of
explicitation).

Second, there is the (deliberately) vague term “information”. This may be
syntactic, semantic/pragmatic, or even phonological information. Any aspect of
a linguistic message may be left implicit by the sender.

Third, the definition deliberately avoids spelling out from where the ad-
dressee might infer the non-verbalized information. From the previous dis-
course? From the extralinguistic context? From her world knowledge? It is of
course legitimate and highly relevant to ask for the inferential sources that are
available to the addressee. But we do not want this question to make our defini-
tion unnecessarily complicated.

We can now define explicitness, which is nothing more than the absence of
implicitness, as follows:

**Explicitness** is the verbalization of information that the addressee might be
able to infer if it were not verbalized.

To put it somewhat informally, explicitness means saying something that the
addressee might have understood anyway. From this definition, it also becomes
clear that explicitness often (but not necessarily) entails **redundancy**, i.e. the en-
coding of information by means of more linguistic material than is necessary.

Now that we have defined explicitness, it is easy to provide a proper defini-
tion of explicitation:

**Explicitation** is observed where a given target text is more explicit than the
 corresponding source text.

It should be pointed out that the definitions of implicitness, explicitness
and explicitation provided in this section are purely product-based; they delib-
erately ignore processing considerations. Thus, the definitions of implicitness
and explicitness discussed above are agnostic as to whether relatively explicit
texts are easier to process than comparatively implicit texts. And the given defi-
nition of explicitation does not say how the target text’s higher degree of explic-
teness is related to the translation process. This latter point is particularly im-
portant. When we investigate translation corpora, we do not see an increase in ex-
plicitness in the process of translation, strictly speaking. We merely observe the
product, i.e. a higher degree of explicitness in the target text (TT) as compared
to the source text (ST), so we need to be careful with our conclusions. This is why the definition of explicitation provided does not say anything about the translation process.

3. TYPES OF EXPPLICITNESS

In an often cited encyclopedia article, Klaudy (2008) distinguishes between the following four kinds of explicitation in translation:

1. **Obligatory explicitation.** Caused by lexicogrammatical differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL).
   - e.g. En. *to be* → Sp. *ser/estar*

2. **Optional explicitation.** Motivated by differences in stylistic preferences between SL and TL.
   - e.g. En. *group* → Ger. *Unternehmen* (‘company’)

3. **Pragmatic explicitation.** Motivated by differences in cultural and/or world knowledge shared by members of SL and TL communities.
   - e.g. Ger. *die Alster* → En. *the lake Alster*

4. **Translation-inherent explicitation.** Caused by “the nature of the translation process itself” (Klaudy 2008:107).
   - e.g. ???

Two important points deserve to be mentioned in connection with Klaudy’s classification. First, Klaudy’s Types 1 to 3 are (obligatorily) caused or (non-obligatorily) motivated by certain differences between SL and TL (in the case of pragmatic explicitation: between the source and target language communities). This means that these types are predicted to exist; they simply have to exist. When we translate from English to Spanish, for example, we know in advance that at some point explicitation will become necessary because Spanish has two copulas with different meanings (cf. e.g. Maienborn 2005), while English has only one. In general, we know from linguistics that lexicogrammatical, stylistic and cultural differences exist for every conceivable language pair. These will inevitably cause or motivate instances of explicitation in translation, and we would be very surprised if this prediction were not supported by empirical data. Type 4, on the other hand, is a very different beast: the translation-inherent type of explicitation is not predicted, but rather postulated to exist, namely by Blum-Kulka’s (1986) Explicitation Hypothesis (see next section). It would therefore not be surprising if we were not to find evidence of this type of explicitation in a given corpus.

Second, while the list above provides typical examples of obligatory, optional and pragmatic explicitations, it fails to give an example of a translation-inherent explicitation. This is because it is not clear to me at all what an in-
stance of this type of explicitation is supposed to look like. In this connection it is interesting to note that Klaudy (2008) herself provides many examples for her Types 1 to 3 (the examples given above are my own), but does not provide a single example of a translation-inherent explicitation. She probably had the same problem as the author of the present article.

4. THEORETICAL ISSUES

Klaudy’s fourth explicitation type seems to be shrouded in mystery. In order to find out more about this postulated type of explicitation, we travel back in time to witness the birth of Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis.

4.1. The Birth of the Explicitation Hypothesis

Blum-Kulka proposed her famous Explicitation Hypothesis in a seminal and highly insightful paper from 1986. It is instructive to quote the relevant passage in full:

> The process of translation […] necessitates a complex text and discourse processing. The process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL text which is more redundant than the SL text. This redundancy can be expressed by a rise in the level of cohesive explicitness in the TL text. This argument may be stated as ‘the explicitation hypothesis’, which postulates an observed [increase in, VB] cohesive explicitness from SL to TL texts regardless of the increase traceable to differences between the two linguistic and textual systems involved. (1986:19; my emphases)

Blum-Kulka tells us that the process of interpretation that invariably occurs in translation “might” lead to a TT which is more redundant, or explicit, than the corresponding ST. However, we do not learn how the interpretation process is supposed to produce this effect. The author then goes on to call her claims an “argument”, which is somewhat surprising: where is the “argument”? If there is an argument at all, neither its premises nor its conclusion are discernible. While we might be inclined to agree that a given TT might come out as more explicit than its ST, Blum-Kulka provides no reason for putting forward her Explicitation Hypothesis, which claims that this has to be the case.

The postulated increase in cohesive explicitness is supposed to occur “regardless of the increase traceable to differences between the two linguistic and textual systems involved.” This additional stipulation makes clear that Blum-Kulka does acknowledge the existence of obligatory explicitations (due to dif-
ferences between “linguistic” systems) and optional explicitations$^3$ (due to differences between “textual” systems); however, the Explicitation Hypothesis postulates an additional, translation-inherent type of explicitation which is supposed to be caused by the “process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text”.

Note that this famous passage from Blum-Kulka (1986) definitely assumes the existence of a separate type of explicitation qualitatively different from the other, language-pair specific types. The passage cannot be taken in a different way. If there are explicitations that are caused or motivated by differences between SL and TL and if there are explicitations that occur regardless of these differences, then there has to be an additional type of “translation-inherent” explicitation – Klaudy’s (2008) mysterious Type 4.

4.2. Problems with the Explicitation Hypothesis

There are three serious problems to be noted in connection with Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis:

Problem 1. Why do I criticize that it is not clear where the “argument” is behind the Explicitation Hypothesis? Does a hypothesis have to rely on an argument? Yes, it has to. More precisely, a scientific hypothesis has to be motivated, i.e. its postulation has to be justified, and Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis is not motivated. This is of crucial importance, as non-motivated hypotheses entail the danger of producing what I like to call pseudo-significant findings, i.e. statistically significant but otherwise meaningless results. In his online statistics textbook, Dallal (2007) provides interesting examples of pseudo-significant findings:

[I]n the early part of the twentieth century, it was noticed that, when viewed over time, the number of crimes increased with membership in the Church of England. This had nothing to do with criminals finding religion. Rather, both crimes and [...] Church membership increased as the population increased. Association does not imply causation! Should opposition increase or decrease accuracy? During WWII it was noticed that bombers were more accurate when there was more opposition from enemy fighters. The reason was that fighter opposition was less when the weather was cloudy. The fighters couldn’t see the bombers, but the bombers couldn’t see their targets! Association does not imply causation, at least not necessarily in the way it appears on the surface! (Dallal 2007; emphasis removed)
Clearly, we would not want to accept the hypothesis that, for example, the presence of many enemy fighters leads to bomber pilots aiming better, even if the correlation mentioned by Dallal is significant. Statistical association in this context clearly does not imply real-world causation. The reason is that this hypothesis is not motivated; the theoretical assumptions underlying it (if there are any) just does not make much sense.

On the other hand, we do want to accept the hypothesis that, for example, smoking causes lung cancer when we find a significant correlation, e.g. in a large-scale epidemiological study. The reason is that this hypothesis is well-motivated; we are justified in postulating it, as small-scale laboratory studies make the assumption of a causal link seem plausible. In other words, in this case the potential connection between association and causation is backed by evidence obtained on independent grounds.

It will have become clear that the Explicitation Hypothesis is much like the fighter–bomber hypothesis mentioned above. It is not motivated on independent grounds and therefore does not qualify as a scientific hypothesis. Thus, even if we did find that translations are significantly more explicit than their source texts and comparable TL texts, we still could not accept the Explicitation Hypothesis. The higher degree of explicitation observed could have causes other than “[t]he process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text” (cf. the weather conditions in the bomber example). An example of an alternative cause would be a (hypothesized) universal tendency of translators to simplify (Baker 1993:244, 1996:181ff), which potentially “raises the level of explicitness by resolving ambiguity” (1996:182) and thus may also result in target texts that are more explicit across the board. It is a general problem of corpus-based translation studies that “the same surface expression may point to different features or tendencies” (1996:180). If we want to accept Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis, we need to demonstrate that it is better motivated than the ‘Explicitation through Simplification Hypothesis’ just sketched. But the big problem is that it is not motivated at all.4

**Problem 2.** Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis clashes head-on with Occam’s Razor: *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* (‘entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity’). This principle, which has become one of the cornerstones of scientific research, calls for hypotheses to be parsimonious in their assumptions and thus not only easier to handle, but also more likely to be true. Blum-Kulka assumes the existence of a new entity, namely a new, translation-inherent type of explicitation. This means that any other hypothesis that might explain an observed tendency of explicitation in translation without assuming a new type of explicitation would be more compatible with Occam’s Razor and thus preferable to the Explicitation Hypothesis.
For example, the Explicitation through Simplification Hypothesis sketched above could explain a universal tendency of explicitation without postulating a new type of explicitation. We would assume that the (hypothesized) urge of translators to simplify leads them to resort to optional and pragmatic explicitations more often than appropriate and/or necessary, \textit{et voilà}, we have explained the data without assuming any mysterious, translation-inherent kind of explicitation. In this way, this hypothesis is more compatible with Occam’s Razor and should thus be preferred over Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis. (However, the ‘Explicitation through Simplification Hypothesis’ is similar to the Explicitation Hypothesis in that it is not motivated; cf. Problem 1).\footnote{METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES}

\textbf{Problem 3.} In a later passage of her paper, Blum-Kulka paraphrases the Explicitation Hypothesis as postulating that “explicitation is a universal strategy inherent in the process of language mediation” (1986:21), where our attention is particularly called to the vague term “strategy”. It is not clear whether Blum-Kulka means a conscious or a subconscious strategy. Olohan and Baker (2000) seem to interpret her as meaning the latter, while Øverås (1998) seems to assume that she means the former. In other words, although both Olohan and Baker as well as Øverås invoke Blum-Kulka’s considerations as the basis for their studies (which will be discussed in the following section), it is not even clear whether they are investigating the same thing. The vagueness with which Blum-Kulka has formulated her hypothesis has led to much confusion in the literature on explicitation right from the outset. The three problems pointed out above are not merely minor shortcomings, but rather fundamental issues that seriously question the usefulness of Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis. In summary, the hypothesis is unmotivated, unparsimonious and vaguely formulated. Since there is a much better hypothesis that can be motivated on independent grounds and is compatible with Occam’s Razor (namely Klaudy’s Asymmetry Hypothesis; see Section 6), the upshot from the above discussion is that Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis should be abandoned entirely and no longer investigated, at least not in its present form.

\textbf{5. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES}

This section discusses the two arguably most often cited empirical studies on explicitation, carried out by Olohan and Baker (Section 5.1) and Øverås (Section 5.2), both of which fail to provide conclusive evidence in favor of Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis. I have not chosen these two particular studies as the focus of my criticism because they are particularly good or bad, but rather because they (and their shortcomings) are representative of previous empirical research on explicitation as a whole (see Note 10 for some references), in part
because they have served as models for other studies. It should be stressed that it is not the aim of this section to malign the importance or quality of the studies to be discussed. Both studies are highly interesting and offer intriguing results, which, however, are difficult to interpret due to the problems that will be pointed out in the following. Due to lack of space, I am forced to focus on the shortcomings of these studies and cannot dwell on their merits, such as the exemplary detail with which Olohan and Baker (2000) discuss differences in the occurrence of the complementizer *that* with different verb forms.

5.1. Subconscious Processes of Syntactic Explicitation?

The Case of Reporting *that*

Olohan and Baker (2000) investigated the optional use of the complementizer *that* in combination with the reporting verbs *say* and *tell* in translated vs. non-translated English texts ("reporting *that*"). It is laudable that the authors must be given credit because they “have tried to be as explicit as possible concerning [their] methodology in order precisely to allow future studies to confirm or challenge [their] results” (2000:158). In the following, I hope to do just that, namely challenge Olohan and Baker’s results. I am going to argue that their study design is problematic in several respects and that their findings can also be explained as the (combined?) effect of other alleged universals of translation.

Olohan and Baker carried out their research using the Translational English Corpus (TEC) and a comparable sample from the British National Corpus (BNC). The TEC consists of English target texts from four different genres translated from “a range of source languages” (2000:151), and the BNC sample, containing non-translated English texts, was chosen so as to mirror the makeup of the TEC. Both corpora contain approximately 3.5 million words. I have two main points of criticism regarding the TEC as employed by Olohan and Baker (2000):

1. Olohan and Baker conducted their research using a preliminary, work-in-progress version of the TEC. As they themselves point out, this version of the TEC was very imbalanced, with each of the four genres being represented very differently. Most notably (and problematically), 82% of the corpus consisted of fiction texts, while newspaper texts represented only 1% of the corpus material (2000:152). This means that the corpus used by Olohan and Baker could essentially be described as a single-genre corpus and not as a representative sample of translated English.
2. The authors fail to disclose the source languages of the texts contained in their preliminary version of the TEC. The current version of the TEC contains translations from 24 different source languages: Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Hopi, Hungarian, Italian, Modern Greek, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Thai and Welsh. It is not clear which source languages were represented in the version of the TEC used by Olohan and Baker (2000).

While the first problem is not grave, as single-genre analyses can yield interesting results concerning explicitation, the second problem will have to be addressed in more detail later on.

Let us briefly review how Olohan and Baker conducted their investigation. In a first step, the authors searched the TEC and the BNC sample for occurrences of the reporting verbs *say* and *tell*. In a second step, occurrences where these verbs do not occur with a clausal complement (as e.g. in *to tell a lie* or *to tell someone to go away*) were excluded so that only cases remained where *that* could potentially be used as an optional complementizer (as e.g. in *She told me [that] she’s happy*). In a third step, the two corpora were compared with respect to the frequency with which *say* and *tell* were used with or without the optional complementizer. The rationale behind this approach was that:

> a higher incidence of the optional *that* in translated English would provide evidence of inherent, subliminal processes of explicitation in translation. Translators clearly do not adopt a conscious strategy of spelling out optional syntactic elements such as *that* in reporting clauses more often than writers producing original texts in the same language. (Olohan and Baker 2000:143)

In other words, Olohan and Baker set out to test a version of Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis. Although it is probably overly optimistic to say that translators “clearly” do not have any conscious control over their use of the complementizer *that* after reporting verbs, Olohan and Baker nonetheless found a very interesting object of investigation in reporting *that*, since translators arguably put less thought into using or not using this purely syntactic – i.e. semantically empty – element than is the case for semantically laden explicitating shifts.

The main results of Olohan and Baker’s study can be summarized as follows:
In the TEC, occurrences of *say* with and without reporting *that* are essentially equally frequent (50.2% vs. 49.8%, respectively). In the BNC sample, on the other hand, the picture is very different. Here, only 23.7% of all occurrences of *say* occur with the complementizer *that*, while 76.3% occur without.

In the case of *tell*, similar differences can be observed between the TEC and the BNC sample. In the TEC, the optional complementizer was used in 62.7% of all cases and omitted in 37.3%. In the BNC sample, the figures showed nearly the reverse: 41.5% for *that* vs. 58.5% for its omission.

These results indicate that reporting *that* is indeed used more frequently in translated than in non-translated English. But unlike Olohan and Baker suggest, their findings do not represent evidence for the Explicitation Hypothesis; there are alternative explanations that do without the dubious assumption of “subliminal processes of explicitation in translation” and are thus more plausible. Two explanations that come to mind are:

- **Source language interference.** As has been mentioned above, the texts contained in the TEC were translated from a large variety of different source languages. Now the question is: how many of these languages *allow* for the use of a complementizer with reporting verbs, and how many *require* it? (For example, Spanish and Portuguese favor the use of a complementizer, but also allow complementizer-free infinitive constructions [Vanderschueren, personal communication], while French and Italian have an obligatory complementizer after reporting verbs.) Without a full answer to this question, Olohan and Baker’s results cannot be interpreted properly, because the greater the number of source languages represented in the TEC stipulating a complementizer after reporting verbs, the more likely it becomes that the higher occurrence of reporting *that* in this corpus is the result of source language interference (cf. Saldanha 2008).

- **Conservatism.** It has been suggested that translators tend to use more conservative language than authors of non-translated texts (Baker 1993:244, 1996:183ff). The related effort to employ more formal means of expression should make translators choose reporting *that* more often than authors of originally English texts, since *that* is typically omitted when writing “in an informal style [...]. After more formal and less common verbs, *that* cannot be left out” (Swan 1980, cited in Olohan and Baker 2000:144).
Both of these approaches, which draw on proposed translation universals other than explicitation, are more attractive than the Explicitation Hypothesis, since they (1) offer real, more plausible explanations for the observations made and (2) do not presuppose a subconscious tendency to explicitate on the part of translators.

5.2. Explicitation in English–Norwegian and Norwegian–English Literary Translations

Øverås (1998) reports the results of a study whose aim was to test Blum-Kulka’s Explicitation Hypothesis through the investigation of English–Norwegian and Norwegian–English literary translations. Her corpus consisted of 1000 sentences taken from 40 novel fragments for each translation direction. She manually identified and counted all explicitations and implicitations occurring in these sentences, with the exception of obligatory shifts, i.e. shifts due to lexicogrammatical differences between English and Norwegian. As with Olohan and Baker (2000), Øverås deserves praise for presenting her methodology with exemplary transparency, making it possible to properly evaluate – and criticize – her results. Again, due to lack of space I will have to focus on the problematic points of the study and neglect its merits such as the elaborate and highly useful typology of explicitating shifts that Øverås proposes.

The first problem with Øverås’ study is the improper and inconsistently applied definition of explicitation on which it is based. Øverås defines explicitation in passing as “the kind of translation process where implicit, co-textually recoverable ST material is rendered explicit in TT” (1998:4). Although this definition is quite vague, it seems to be compatible with the definition proposed here (in Section 2). However, as we will see in the following, Øverås does not adhere to this definition, counting cases as explicitations in which information is verbalized that is definitely not “co-textually recoverable”.

The second issue is of a theoretical nature and is related to the general weaknesses of the Explicitation Hypothesis that we noted in Section 4. As we have seen, Blum-Kulka (1986) leaves us wondering about the exact nature of translation-inherent explicitation. Is it a conscious or a subconscious phenomenon? What are its causes? Øverås offers a simple answer to these questions: translation-inherent explicitation is the result of an operational norm in the sense of Toury, i.e. a norm on the lowest and most concrete level that directly governs “the decisions made during the act of translation” (1995:58ff). It remains completely mysterious to me how Øverås has come to conceive of translation-inherent explicitation as the effect of a translational norm. Toury (1995:61ff) goes to great lengths to emphasize “two features inherent in the very notion of norm [...] the socio-cultural specificity of norms and their basic insta-
If translation-inherent explicitation were indeed the result of a translational norm, it should be highly language-pair specific (contrary to the claims of the Explicitation Hypothesis). Since norms are (1) culture-specific and (2) unstable, they epitomize the opposite of universality. A conception of translation-inherent explicitation as the result of an operational norm thus has to be rejected.

A third problem is connected with an important suggestion given by Blum-Kulka. In her 1986 paper, Blum-Kulka concludes that “it should be possible to ascertain by empirical research to what extent explicitation is indeed a norm that cuts across translations from various languages and to what extent it is a language pair specific phenomenon” (1986:23). In other words, she recognizes the problem of distinguishing between optional and translation-inherent explicitations. Optional explicitations of course need to be identified and excluded when investigating the Explicitation Hypothesis. Blum-Kulka thus cautions her readers that “it would be necessary to first carry out a large scale contrastive stylistic study (in a given register) [...] and then to examine translations to and from both languages to investigate shifts [...] that occur in translation” (Blum-Kulka 1986:33).

Øverås quotes this important advice given by Blum-Kulka but then goes on to say that “such investigation into contrastive features was not possible” (1998:9). It is understandable that a full-blown investigation into the stylistic norms of English and Norwegian was not possible within the scope of Øverås’ study. But the lack of this contrastive foundation implies a big problem: ignorant of many stylistic contrasts between English and Norwegian, Øverås of course encounters a number of cases where it is not clear whether they are optional or potentially translation-inherent explicitations, which she “included on the assumption that, while not part of the present survey, the investigation of initial norms may benefit from research that includes all occurrences” (1998:9).

I cannot see how the investigation of initial norms (Toury 1995:56f), which is at best only peripherically related to the aim of Øverås’ study, could justify such a methodologically fatal step. Doubtful cases should never be regarded as evidence for or against anything.

Speaking of doubtful cases, let us have a look at three examples that Øverås included in her study as potentially translation-inherent explicitations:

(1) **NorOrig:** *Den hvite mannen knipser.*

‘The white man clicks.’

**EngTrans:** *The white man clicks his camera.* (Øverås 1998:8)

In (1), the author of the Norwegian original uses the verb *knipse*, which means ‘to click,’ or, in this context, ‘to photograph, to take a snapshot’. Since the direct English equivalent of *knipse, to click*, does not share the idiomatic meaning...
of its Norwegian counterpart, the translator decides to expand the verb to the collocation *to click one’s camera* (which, for obvious reasons, is more explicit than *knipse*). Since English does not have an expression comparable to *knipse* in terms of implicitness, the translator is forced to perform this explicitating shift given her prior decision to translate *knipse* as *to click*. We are therefore dealing with what appears to be an instance of obligatory explicitation possibly triggered by an instance of source language interference. Thus, it is incorrect to count this example as evidence in a study aiming to test the Explicitation Hypothesis (and purporting to exclude obligatory shifts). The instance of explicitation in question is clearly the result of a lexical contrast between English and Norwegian and is thus specific to this particular language pair.

(2) **NorOrig:** Jeg lente meg fram over bordet og fisket ut en Hobby.

‘...and fished out a Hobby.’

**EngTrans:** I leaned forward over the table and fished out a Hobby cigarette. (Øverås 1998:11)

In (2), the translator explicitates the word *cigarette*. The motivation behind this minor shift seems to be the fact that while most Norwegian readers probably know that *Hobby* is a cigarette brand, English readers might have difficulty in drawing this inference. This example therefore appears to be a paradigm case of pragmatic explicitation, which should of course be excluded from a study on translation-inherent explicitation.

Let us look at a final example:

(3) **NorOrig:** Nå er St. Patric den største helgenen i hele Irland.

‘Now St. Patric is the greatest saint in all of Ireland.’

**EngTrans:** Now Saint Patric is regarded as the greatest saint in all of Ireland. (Øverås 1998:10)

Øverås’ inclusion of (3) as evidence for the Explicitation Hypothesis is particularly troubling, as this example does not even qualify as an instance of explicitation, according to either the definitions provided in Section 2 or to Øverås’ own definition quoted above. In the Norwegian ST of (3), the author expresses his belief in the proposition that St. Patric is the greatest saint in all of Ireland. In the English TT, on the other hand, things are very different. Here, the translator has expanded the verb phrase to *is regarded as*, entailing a considerable change in meaning: the belief in the proposition is no longer attributed to the author, but rather to an unspecified person or group of persons. The translator has fundamentally changed the truth-conditional meaning of the TT vis-à-vis the ST.
So we are not dealing with a shift from implicit to explicit meaning here, but with an (ideologically motivated?) change in meaning brought about by the translator; the TT encodes a different state of affairs from the ST, so the question of whether the expansion of the verb phrase performed by the translator is to be counted as a case of explicitation does not even arise. (If anything, the expansion should be counted as an implicitation rather than an explicitation, since the passive verb form is regarded as leaves implicit to whom the belief of the proposition expressed is attributed.)

Øverås justifies her decision to include (3) as an instance of explicitation by informing us that “it often proved difficult to determine the extent to which a shift affects meaning” and that “all instances perceived to explicitate have therefore been included” (1998:11). It should go without saying that counting data as evidence for a hypothesis should not rely on the “perception” of the researcher but on objective criteria such as those proposed in Section 2.

Let us turn to Øverås’ results. Table 1 (taken from Øverås 1998:15) presents an overview of the explicitating and implicitating shifts that she counted in her data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English–Norwegian</th>
<th>Norwegian–English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicitation</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicitation</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that there are roughly 100 more explicitating shifts in the English-Norwegian translations than in the Norwegian-English translations investigated by Øverås. As for the implicitating shifts, they show a similarly skewed distribution over the two translation directions which in this case is even more pronounced: there are almost twice as many shifts from English into Norwegian than in the opposite translation direction. Most interestingly, explicitating shifts in both translation directions are consistently more frequent than implicitating ones.

Despite the lopsided distribution of explicitations across the two translation directions, Øverås optimistically tells us that “one may safely conclude that [...] Blum-Kulka’s explicitation hypothesis is confirmed”. However, she adds the proviso that “[c]onfirmation was stronger in translations from English into Norwegian than in the opposite direction” (1998:16). I find this conclusion highly implausible. How can the hypothesis that “explicitation is a universal
strategy inherent in the process of language mediation” (Blum-Kulka 1986:21) find “stronger” confirmation in one translation direction than in the other? There is clearly something wrong here.

I would like to propose an alternative conclusion that seems much more plausible: the explicitations identified by Øverås are not of the translation-inherent type; rather, they go back to a mixture of obligatory, optional and pragmatic explicitations (cf. the examples discussed above). This would explain the imbalanced distribution of explicitations across the two translation directions quite nicely: we would expect English and Norwegian to differ in terms of the degree of explicitness they favor lexicogrammatically and stylistically, and these differences probably account for the skewing observed by Øverås. Overall, the lexicographical properties and/or stylistic preferences of English seem to favor a higher degree of explicitness than those of Norwegian.

Since the alternative interpretation of Øverås’ findings offered in the previous paragraph does not require the assumption that a number of translation-inherent explicitations are ‘hidden’ among her data, it is more in line with Occam’s Razor and thus to be preferred over Øverås’ interpretation of her results as evidence for the Explicitation Hypothesis. Still, her finding that there are more explicitations than implicitations in both translation directions is remarkable. We will have to explain it in the following section.

6. ABANDONING THE EXPLICITATION HYPOTHESIS

In sum, this paper has pointed out four main problems with the Explicitation Hypothesis. The first two problems are of a theoretical nature (see Section 4 on Blum-Kulka 1986), while the other two are of the methodological kind (see Section 5 on Baker and Olohan 2000 and Øverås 1998):

1. The assumption of a separate, translation-inherent type of explicitation is (1) unmotivated and (2) collides with Occam’s Razor. Instead of explaining anything, the Explicitation Hypothesis only creates the need for further explanation. Moreover, its investigation entails the danger of producing what I have called pseudo-significant findings.

2. The nature of translation-inherent explicitation is not clear; is it supposed to be a subconscious or a conscious phenomenon?

3. All studies on translation-inherent explicitation (that I know of) fail to control for interfering factors such as other types of explicitation, source language interference, the effect of other (potential) translation universals, etc.

4. Many studies either do not provide a definition of explicitation at all, or they provide one but do not adhere to it (cf. Becher forthcoming a).
This of course entails the danger of counting pseudo-explicitations such as (3) above.

The four problems summarized above permit the following two, somewhat radical conclusions. First, the Explicitation Hypothesis should be abandoned because it is not a useful hypothesis. Second, previous studies have failed to provide conclusive evidence for the hypothesis anyway.

In the remainder of this section, I am going to argue that a slightly extended and motivated version of Klaudy’s (2009) Asymmetry Hypothesis can serve as a more useful and plausible guide for further research on explicitation. The hypothesis postulates that explicitations in the L1→L2 direction are not always counterbalanced by implicitations in the L2→L1 direction because translators – if they have a choice – prefer to use operations involving explicitation, and often fail to perform optional implicitation. (Klaudy and Károly 2005:14)

I find this formulation somewhat problematic, as (1) it does not specify which kinds of explicitation are covered (Klaudy’s Types 1 to 3, or only optional explicitations?), (2) the term prefer evokes the impression that a conscious decision is being made on the part of the translator (I would like to admit the possibility of subconscious explicitation in my version of the hypothesis) and (3) the term fail has a prescriptive flavor to it. As will become clear in the following, I do not think we can blame translators for being more explicit than authors of non-translated texts. I would thus like to propose a slightly modified version of Klaudy’s hypothesis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Asymmetry Hypothesis (modified version):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obligatory, optional and pragmatic explicitations tend to be more frequent than the corresponding implicitations regardless of the SL/TL constellation at hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Asymmetry Hypothesis claims that translators display a tendency to explicitate, but it avoids positing a separate, translation-inherent type of explicitation. It makes do with Klaudy’s explicitation Types 1 to 3, which are unproblematic and uncontroversial. The only remaining problem is that the Asymmetry Hypothesis still needs to be properly motivated (see Klaudy 2009 for a first sketch). This is what I am going to do in the following.
6.1. Motivating the Asymmetry Hypothesis

It is well known that human communication is driven by two competing forces, or principles (see e.g. Atlas and Levinson 1981, Horn 1984, Fabricius-Hansen 2005; cf. also Grice 1975):

1. **The Q Principle**: “Say as much as you can!” (→ explicitness)
2. **The R Principle**: “Say no more than you must!” (→ implicitness)

(adapted from Horn 1984:13)

It is obvious that strictly speaking, the two principles contradict each other: “[a] speaker obeying only Q would tend to say everything she knows on the off-chance that it might prove informative, while a speaker obeying only R would probably, to be on the safe side, not open her mouth” (Horn 1984:15). It is impossible for a speaker to stick to just one of the two principles (which would not be very smart anyway); rather, when preparing her message for formulation, the speaker has to decide which principle to follow to which degree. In other words, the speaker has to determine the most favorable trade-off between the two principles. The Q and R principles can thus be regarded as the two (virtual) end points of an explicitness–implicitness scale inherent to linguistic communication.

It will be apparent that the specific communication situation at hand determines where a favorable trade-off between the two principles might be, i.e. which point on the explicitness–implicitness scale should be chosen for the message to be formulated. In face-to-face communication, the trade-off will tend towards the implicit end of the scale: if the hearer signals that my message turned out to be too implicit “Huh, what do you mean?”, I can elaborate, i.e. make it more explicit ex post. In written text, on the other hand, the trade-off will tend towards the explicit end of the scale: since I do not have access to direct hearer feedback in this case, I will tend to be too explicit rather than too implicit when in doubt (cf. von Hahn 1997).

What is important to see here is that in terms of the explicitness–implicitness scale spanned by the Q and R Principles, translations are written texts par excellence. In other words, translations should tend to be located even further towards the explicit end of the scale than non-translated texts (cf. Klaudy 2009). This is due to two properties of the communicative situation typically underlying translation:

**Property 1**: The communicative situation underlying translation is typically characterized by cultural distance between (SL) author and (TL) reader (House 1997).

Konrad Ehlich has insightfully described written discourse as a “dilated speech situation” (1984). Writers and readers communicate as they would in
face-to-face communication, albeit in a spatially and temporally “dilated” manner. (For example: an author produces a book and the reader answers by writing the author a letter.) This is why it was claimed above that written communication tends to be relatively explicit: increasing the explicitness of the message \textit{ex post} is not very practical in this communication situation.

Now in translation, the speech situation is even more dilated than in monolingual written discourse: the distance between writer and reader is not only spatial and temporal, but also cultural. Recognizing this, responsible translators will move even further than authors of non-translated texts towards the explicit end of the Q–R scale in order to compensate for the perceived cultural distance. Viewed from this perspective, the tendency of translators to explicitate is nothing mysterious; it is not due to “subconscious processes” (Olohan and Baker 2000), but rather the result of a number of – conscious or subconscious (it does not matter in the present context) – attempts of translators to compensate for the cultural ‘dilatedness’ characteristic of translation as a specific communication scenario (cf. Saldanha 2008:28, who stresses the dependence of explicitation on “translators’ assumptions about their readership and about their role as literary and cultural mediators”).

Note that the perceived need to deal with a dilated speech situation is not translation-specific. Thus, explicitations resulting from translators’ preoccupation with reducing cultural distance cannot be called “translation-inherent”. First, as I have argued above, translators follow the same communicative principles as authors of non-translated texts: they choose a certain point on the explicitness–implicitness scale in accordance with the perceived dilatedness of the communication situation at hand. Second, the need to bridge cultural gaps also arises in monolingual communication. Imagine, for example, the case of an immigrant author writing about the culture of his country of origin. Here, the same cultural bridging takes place as in translation. We should thus expect the author to pick a point on the Q–R scale near its explicit end – as would a translator.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that compensatory strategies are not necessarily applied only where appropriate. It may well be that translators, driven by an unspecific desire to bridge the cultural gap between SL author and TL reader, explicitate even in contexts where cultural differences are not directly relevant. For example, translators might compensate for the (possible) incoherence of text passages expressing source-culture specific concepts by increasing explicitness in other (related) text passages. (Another possibility would be that translators simply overuse compensatory, explicitating strategies.) Explicitations of this type might look puzzling to the researcher as to their origin. However, as the above line of argumentation has shown, we do not need to appeal to a mysterious notion of “translation-inherence” to explain their occurrence.
Property 2: The communicative situation underlying translation is typically characterized by a great deal of communicative risk (cf. Pym 2005, whom the line of argument below follows).

Authors of non-translated texts are paid for content, whereas translators are paid for communication. The main task of the author is to make her thoughts available to the reader by putting them on paper. The main task of the translator, in contrast, is to ensure understanding between SL author and TL reader, avoiding misunderstanding at all costs. If the reader – for whatever reason – has difficulties in understanding the translated text, she will be quick to blame the translator. Since translators are paid for linguistic mediation, i.e. for achieving understanding, they are always the prime suspects when communication problems occur. There is even the unpleasant case where a translator is blamed for the difficulty of a text that was already hard to understand in its SL version.

The upshot is that translators have to cope with a certain kind of risk – the risk of not being understood. Accordingly, it is not surprising that translators will go to great lengths to ensure understanding, and this is where explicitation comes into play. As we have noted in Section 2, implicitness is a viable option when the reader might be able to infer the implicit information. Even in cases where the inference is an easy and obvious one, it may still happen that a given reader fails to draw it. The result may be a failure to understand – and thus a problem for the poor translator, who had merely attempted to stay true to the SL text. Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that translators will move up on the Q–R scale, i.e. they will tend to be too explicit rather than too implicit when in doubt (and maybe even when not in doubt).

What is the risk of being too explicit? A waste of energy and paper – not too bad. What is the risk of being too implicit? Communicative breakdown – very bad. This shows that it is perfectly natural and justifiable for translators to adopt a strategy of avoiding implicitness, even where it is not licensed by the source text.

Again, note that the tendency of translators to avoid risk cannot be called “translation-inherent”. First, it depends on the individual translator how much risk she is willing to take. Translators may either be rather confident or averse to risk-taking. Moreover, risk differs across translation scenarios (cf. e.g. the translation of a law vs. the translation of a cooking recipe). Second, authors of non-translated texts have to deal with the same kind of risk that translators face (cf. von Hahn 1997), albeit to a lesser degree. Imagine, for example, the case of a scientist writing for a lay public, who has to deal with the very same kind of communicative risk as a translator.
6.2. What Explicitational Asymmetry Looks Like in Practice

We have now provided a motivation for postulating the Asymmetry Hypothesis: explicitations tend to occur more frequently than implicitations in translation due to two typical properties of the communication scenario underlying this kind of discourse. In this way, we have also offered an explanation for Øverås’ (1998) finding that explicitations outnumber implicitations in her corpus. Let us see how the explicitation–implicitation imbalance posited by the Asymmetry Hypothesis works out in practice by looking at a concrete example (taken from Becher forthcoming a):

(4) EngOrig: The virus is one of the major causes of chronic liver disease, probably accounting for even more cases than excessive alcohol use.

GerTrans: HCV verursacht wahrscheinlich mehr chronische Lebererkrankungen als Alkoholmißbrauch. Das Virus steht damit in vorderster Reihe der Faktoren, die zu Leberleiden führen.

‘HCV probably causes more cases of chronic liver disease than alcohol abuse. The virus thus is among the prime factors that cause liver disease.’

The example consists of an excerpt from an article published in the popular scientific magazine Scientific American alongside its German translation, which appeared in the German magazine Spektrum der Wissenschaft. The English ST sentence consists of a main clause to which an ing-adjunct has been attached, a construction which is highly underspecified semantically (cf. Blühdorn 2009 on semantic underspecificity in clause linkage). Ing-adjuncts may express a variety of relations ranging from temporality to causality (Behrens 1999). The translation problem that we witness here is that German does not have a construction syntactically and semantically equivalent to the English ing-adjunct. The translator has thus decided to split the ST sentence into two TT sentences, a common translation choice in such cases (cf. Fabricius-Hansen 1998, 1999). This leaves the translator with an interesting choice: if she uses a connective such as damit ‘thus’ to clarify the semantic connection between the two sentences, as was done in (4), the TT comes out as more explicit than the ST; if she does not use a connective, the TT will be more implicit than the ST.

We see here a confirmation of Toury’s claim that “the need [...] to deviate from source-text patterns can always be realized in more than one way” (1995:57). In this case, the necessary deviation from the ST pattern may either be an explicitation or an implicitation – both would be justifiable choices given the semantic unspecificity of the English ing-adjunct. We do not know the exact reason why the translator of (4) chose the explicit over the implicit variant.
Maybe risk avoidance? Since German discourse is generally characterized by a
higher degree of explicitness in the encoding of semantic relations than English
discourse (see e.g. House 2004, Fabricius-Hansen 2005, Behrens 2004, Becher
forthcoming b), it is also possible that the explicitation performed by the trans-
lator of (4) is simply due to the application of a “cultural filter” (House 1997),
i.e. adjustment of the ST to the stylistic norms of the TL. But even if this is not
the case, we have no fundamental problem in explaining this instance of explici-
tation, as the two typical properties of translation qua communication scenario
outlined above allow us to predict the predominance of explicating shifts in
cases where translators could have chosen an implicating shift instead.

7. CONCLUSION

Since the main points of this paper have already been summarized in Section 1
and at the beginning of the previous section, I will confine myself to drawing
some more general conclusions in this final section.

In the previous section, I have argued that translation is not fundamentally
different from monolingual discourse as far as the balance between explicitness
and implicitness is concerned. When choosing a point on the explicitness–
implicitness scale, translators are guided by the very same considerations as
monolingual authors. At times, the latter also have to deal with cultural distance
and/or communicative risk. This means that explicitation, insofar as it is caused
by the tendencies of translators to compensate for cultural distance and to avoid
risk, is neither “translation-inherent” (translators do not do anything translation-
specific, they only do what authors of non-translated texts do) nor “universal” in
a strict sense (there will always be situations in which translators do not display
the mentioned tendencies).19

As far as the explicitness–implicitness dimension of language use is con-
cerned, translation is not a “third code”;20 it is not an exceptional or anomalous
kind of discourse governed by other constraints than normal language use. As
stated by House, “Translation is no more and no less than a practical activity. It
can be described as an act of performance, of parole, not of langue or compen-
tence” (2008:11). Rather, the relative explicitness of translated discourse is a
straightforward result of the communicative circumstances under which it is
typically produced. The Asymmetry Hypothesis that I have argued for above
does justice to this insight, as it merely claims that explicitations tend to be
more frequent that implicitations in translation, thus allowing for exceptional
cases where cultural distance is insignificant and/or communicative risk is low.
In these cases, we do not expect explicitations to outnumber implicitations.21

One might be tempted to say that explicitation is universal in a wider sense,
namely in the sense that the tendency to explicitate is not characteristic, but

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typical of translated discourse. This, however, would be misleading, since it contradicts the normal usage of the term “universal”. In linguistics, for example, universals are usually defined as “those properties that are necessarily common to all human languages” (Comrie 2003:195). Given this normal use of the term, a predominance of explicitating vis-à-vis implicitating shifts would have to be a property that is necessarily common to all translations, or translation scenarios, in order to qualify as a translation universal. However, as the above considerations have shown, this is highly unlikely. It is therefore misleading to call explicitation a (possible) “universal of translation”, as e.g. Baker (1993, 1996) does.

Finally, I would like to take up the “important theoretical question” raised by House “of how useful or indeed possible and thus justifiable the positing of translation universals such as the ones mentioned above are, [which] has not been touched let alone recognized by all researchers in the field of translation studies” (2008:10f). House’s own view is that “the quest for translation universals is in essence futile, i.e. that there are no, and there can be no, translation universals.”22 One of her five arguments for this stance is that much of what may look like a translation universal can in fact be attributed to general “universals of language also applying to translation.” (2008:11) This is quite a radical view, but it gains some support from the considerations made in the present paper: the Q and R principles and the explicitness–implicitly scale they span form a genuine universal of language use, and it is this linguistic universal which accounts for the observation that translators tend to explicitate rather than to implicitate – in certain contexts.

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Notes

1 As the labels chosen by Klaudy can be a bit misleading, it might be desirable to replace them with better terms in the future. For example, optional explicitation is ‘pragmatic’ in the sense that it is dependent on the communicative preferences of the target language community, i.e. on its pragmatic norms; and pragmatic explicitation is ‘optional’ in the sense that it normally does not have to be performed.
Due to lack of space, I cannot discuss Klaudy’s (2008) classification in due detail, nor can I comment on the given examples of explicitation. The reader is referred to Klaudy’s interesting paper.

Blum-Kulka (1986) also seems to accept the existence of Klaudy’s Type no. 3, viz. pragmatic explicitations.

It is sometimes claimed that the Explicitation Hypothesis can be motivated as follows. When translators interpret the ST, they enrich their interpretation with inferential meaning (e.g. by interpreting temporal sequence as causal sequence), as is normal in text comprehension (cf. e.g. Graesser et al. 1994, Carston 2009). This pragmatically enriched interpretation is of course more explicit than the ST itself. (So far I agree.) It may thus lead to a more explicit TT. This conclusion, however, is a fallacy. It depends on the assumption that translators directly verbalize their (more explicit) mental representation of the ST without applying operations that might render it more implicit, such as politeness strategies, omission of contextually inferable material, etc. There is no reason why translators – in contrast to authors of non-translated texts – should skip the application of such operations.

Another problem with respect to Occam’s Razor is that Blum-Kulka applies her Explicitation Hypothesis not only to translations, but to all kinds of linguistic mediation, under which she also subsumes speech production by foreign language learners (1986:19–21). It is easy to see that the latter assumption, which presupposes that translators rely on similar cognitive processes as foreign language learners, strongly conflicts with Occam’s Razor.

See http://ronaldo.cs.tcd.ie/tec2/jnlp/, where the TEC may be queried online free of charge. Again, Olohan and Baker deserve credit for making their data openly available, giving other researchers the chance to challenge and/or expand upon their findings.

The problem pointed out here is not specific to Olohan and Baker’s study. In general, one has to be very cautious when doing research on monolingual translation corpora, i.e. corpora containing translations only. Corpora of this type should only be used for hypothesis formation, not for hypothesis testing (cf. Bernardini 2010).

Kenny (2005) attempted to validate Olohan and Baker’s (2000) results by investigating the (non)occurrence of optional that in a German–English parallel corpus. However, her study has its own problems and thus cannot be taken as a confirmation of Olohan and Baker’s results. Due to lack of space, I cannot discuss Kenny’s study in detail. Suffice it to say that Kenny herself admits that in order to properly interpret her results, “one would first have to ascertain whether translators insert that in places where the German [author, VB] did not use [a complementizer], but did use a subjunctive form to make the reported nature of a clause explicit. If this were the case, it might be difficult to argue that the English structure including that was actually more explicit than the German structure with no [complementizer].” (2005:161)

Strangely, nowhere in Øverås (1998) is it directly said that she views translation-inherent explicitation as a translational norm. We have to infer this from some vague remarks on page 3 of her article, as well as from its subtitle, “An investigation of norms in literary translation”.

If in the future we should find out that more conservative hypotheses cannot explain the occurrence of explicitation phenomena in translation, we can still go back to Blum-Kulka’s assumption of a translation-inherent type of explicitation, which, however, would have to be made a lot more precise before it could serve as a useful guide for research.

The Explicitation Hypothesis is not useful in the sense that it is dangerous to investigate. On the other hand, it has sparked a great deal of interest in the important phenomenon of explicitation (and impliciation) in translation. In this respect, the Explicitation Hypothesis has been ex-
tremely useful for translation studies. I would like to stress in this connection that the aim of the present article is not to denigrate Shoshana Blum-Kulka’s seminal and still very readable 1986 paper, but to show that after an initial phase of pioneering explicitation research, the time has come to abandon the Explicitation Hypothesis and to look for a better alternative.

Another promising approach to the study of explicitation in translation is not to depart from a hypothesis at all, but to approach the data quantitatively from a bottom-up, hypothesis-generating perspective. Such a data-driven approach has been pursued in recent years by Hansen-Schirra, Kunz, Neumann and Steiner at the University of Saarbrücken. One of their goals is to establish a more precise operationalization of the concept of explicitness/explicitation, which they are attempting to achieve “by defining explicitness and explicitation, by stratifying it in terms of different linguistic levels, by tightening its boundaries, and by modularizing it in a multifunctional perspective” (Steiner 2005:19). Initial results from this promising approach are presented in Hansen-Schirra et al. (2007), Steiner (2008) and Kunz (2009).

What I like about Klaudy and Károly’s formulation of the Asymmetry Hypothesis is the “not always” part (corresponding to “tend to” in my version of the hypothesis): they do not claim that explicitations outnumber implicitations in each and every case. As will become clear in the following, this weak formulation is fully justified.

To ease exposition, I will ignore hybrid scenarios such as real-time written communication (as it takes place in Internet chatrooms, for example), which on the explicitness–implicitness scale would fall somewhere between face-to-face communication and ‘traditional’ written discourse. Also, it should be borne in mind that, as Biber (1988) has pointed out, there is no single linguistic dimension that neatly corresponds to the distinction ‘spoken vs. written’, and the dimension ‘explicit vs. implicit’ is no exception. The relative explicitness of written as compared to spoken discourse is just a tendency.

This sweeping claim is of course an overgeneralization, but I think it nicely highlights an important difference between the task of the author and that of the translator (see the following remarks).

The always part of this claim might be too strong, but that does not need to concern us here.

Moreover, there seem to be strong individual differences between translators with respect to their use of explicitating shifts (Saldanha 2008:30ff).

As far as less controversial phenomena such as source language interference are concerned, it may well be justified to call translation a “third code”. The term goes back to Frawley (1984).

Denturck provides results from the investigation of a corpus consisting of translations between French and Dutch in which implicitations (of connectives) were found to be more frequent than explicitations in one of the two translation directions (Dutch→French), whereas the opposite was the case in the other direction (Denturck 2009, Denturck and Niemegeers 2010). While it remains to ascertain in how far stylistic differences between French and Dutch are responsible for this remarkable finding, Denturck’s results show that explicitations do not invariably outnumber implicitations.

Cf. Tymoczko (1998, 2005), who makes a similar point as House in saying that “[n]ot all conclusions of research are applicable to all translation types or all translation contexts. It follows […] that [translation studies] should give up the search for universals.” (2005:1095). Unfortunately, warning voices such as the ones by Tymoczko and House have gone largely unnoticed in the development of corpus-based translation studies.
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